No. 35

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

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His face lit up suddenly when he saw that she drew her head aside with a half smile. What she had told him was something he had not expected.
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ALL ARRANGEMENTS pertaining to domestic and social life he entrusted to his wife. But when he awoke to the fact that Alice showed a tendency to play unfair with him, he adopted more stringent measures. At least he thought he did. But his warnings fell upon deaf ears.

He had always been above spying upon Alice, although he feared he had cause to doubt her.

Frequent and harsh quarrels had made him reluctant to court more trouble in his household.

In assuming the attitude of disdainful acquiescence, Gordon made a serious mistake. He should have known that a woman of Alice's type will make her own moral laws and live up to them, too.

He should have known that she would not endure his indifference forever.

He countenanced her flirtations with other men without making a protest. He allowed her to go and come where and when she pleased. Small wonder, then that she grew contemptuous of him.

"I can't understand how your husband lets you get away with it," one of Alice's close friends—a woman of the same ilk, said to her one afternoon as they met in Walling's Tea Room. "Why, you can do as you please and he stands for it."

Alice's answer was accompanied by a peculiar smile.

"My husband is easy."

And it was true. Philip Gordon was easy. It was not a commendable attribute. It was a most glaring fault.

Had Phil been more strict and more observant of his wife's movements poor old John Procter would not be bemoaning the loss of his youngest daughter Betty.

Bob Harding would not be eating his heart out

trying to locate his dearly beloved wife.

Gordon showed an astounding degree of assinine stupidity when he allowed Alice to pull the wool over his eyes during their two meetings in the tower.

Had he prosecuted his search he would have stumbled across a secret of almost unbelievable cruelty.

Phil should have grown suspicious when his wife insisted upon keeping Nora Evans in her employ as a confidential maid, for he had more than an inkling that the Evans girl had a criminal record.

But as in many other matters of more or less importance, he bowed meekly to Alice's will and thus assisted in the promotion of a crime within his own household.

It was Nora Evans who discovered the secret passage which led from her mistress's boudoir to the tower. And it was this same Nora Evans who alone knew of the existence of a secret chamber in the tower.

But both women were equally guilty when an innocent person became imprisoned in that secret chamber with the intention of killing her by slow starvation.

This person was none other than Betty Harding!

From the hour of her sister's marriage to the young automobile mechanic, Alice kept track of Betty. She practically knew every move the latter made.

She had succeeded in causing an estrangement between Betty and her father.

And, when a few months later John Procter relented and prayed for the return of his "baby girl" as he fondly called her, it was Alice who barred the way by stooping to the most contemptible trickery.

Betty wrote several pitiful letters to her father, asking to be forgiven and for financial help.

None of these letters reached the heartbroken father.

And Alice took good care to keep the newspapers out of the old gentleman's sight when they printed the article which dealt with Bob Harding's arrest and consequent imprisonment on the charge of assault to kill.

Alice again resorted to trickery when she learned that Betty was convicted of having murdered Waterford Burley, the Detroit artist. But this time she was not successful in tracing her sister's movements.

She had become somewhat careless perhaps, because she took it for granted that Betty would be sentenced to the penitentiary for life, or end her existence in the electric chair.

But neither of these things came to pass. Betty managed to escape and every clue of her whereabouts was lost.

Then came the unexpected news that an old Italian in Detroit had confessed to the artists's murder, automatically clearing Betty.

When Alice read this in the paper, her eyes gleamed hideously. She had her heart set on becoming the sole heir of her father's fortune. If Betty should turn up the estate would be divided.

And so, in order to gratify her insane desire for wealth, one woman coldly contemplated the murder of another.

With murder in her heart, Alice renewed the search for her sister. How she succeeded was hinted at in a former chapter.

She learned from Dr. Van Buren that he had waited upon a young woman by the name of Harding living on the third floor back in a tenement house on a certain street.

The physician's description fit Betty exactly. Under the cover of darkness, long after all decent folk were asleep, Alice, accompanied by Nora Evans, drove to Chi

cago in a closed car.

They found Betty without much difficulty, and by a network of lies induced her to come with them.

But the moment Betty reached the solitary confinement of the tower, she realized that she had been trapped. She screamed at the top of her voice to be released, but Alice shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"Why, you poor idiot," she exclaimed. "Don't you see that I am doing you a favor? I am saving you from a life prison sentence and maybe worse."

And Betty fell to weeping softly to herself. She saw that her sister spoke the truth.

She did not know that her innocence had been established by the Italian's confession in Detroit. She still regarded herself as a fugitive from justice.

From that night on Betty remained a prisoner in the secret chamber of the tower. It was she whom Phil Gordon had seen at the window.

It was she who appeared to old John Procter while the latter dozed under a tree on the grounds. And thus the mystery of the tower is explained to the reader.

For Betty, fighting like a weak creature driven to bay, was by no means willing to pass out of existence by the road mapped out for her by Alice. She discovered a method of leaving the tower at certain intervals.

The fear of being discovered and hauled back to prison always drove her back. She wrote long letters burning with love and devotion to her young husband, but Bob Harding never saw a single one of them.

And there was something else which persuaded the unhappy young woman to remain within the confines of the tower.

Betty loved her father. She did not want to bring additional shame and sorrow upon his old head by being re-arrested and forced to undergo the punishment of a

murderess.

But the time had come when she preferred anything rather than the continued isolation. She begged Alice to tell her father the truth.

Her strength was fast waning, and in moments of deepest melancholy she prayed for death.

"If I can only see Bob and my father once more before I die, I'll be satisfied," she told her sister.

Alice, upon her last visit had promised that she would do all in her power to soften her father toward Betty. And now Betty was waiting anxiously to hear the result.

She had given up all hope of ever seeing her husband again, for Alice had told her that she knew nothing whatsover about Bob Harding's whereabouts — which was another black lie.

When Alice came to the tower this morning, an evil look was on her face. It was the look one might see on the face of a murderer at heart.

And in truth she was nothing else. She hoped that she would find Betty breathing her last, but in this she was disappointed. Upon entering the secret chamber she was greeted by the usual low moan which ended in a sob.

"Did you — did you tell father?" Betty asked weakly.

"Not yet," Alice replied coldly. "You see," she lied brazenly, "he has not been well the last few days. I am afraid the shock will kill him. Now you must have patience, Betty. It is no small matter to tell a father that his daughter has been convicted of murder and that she is hiding from the police."

"But I am innocent," Betty sobbed. "God knows, I am innocent. Dad, with his money could help me establish my innocence."

"I am not so sure about that," the older sister said

unfeelingly. "When you married against his will he washed his hands of you. What do you suppose he'll do when I tell him that you are an escaped convict?"

Betty buried her thin face in her hands and wept aloud. Finally Alice hushed her with:

"Just keep on if you want to let others know that you are hiding here. I won't be to blame if the police find out that you——"

"Oh, I don't care if they do," the wretched woman interrupted. "I can't stand this any longer. I'll make an end of it to-morrow." She added with more spirit: "I'll go to dad and tell him the whole truth. I don't care if he heaps curses upon my head."

Alice confronted her sister with unconcealed wrath blazing in her eyes.

"Alright, you fool!" she snarled. "You can do anything you please so far as I am concerned, but I'll tell you this—if you cross me I am through with you. That is the thanks I get for keeping you out of the penitentiary or perhaps the electric chair. Oh, you ungrateful wretch!"

Betty, overcome by a sudden weakness, dropped back upon her couch and wept quietly to herself.

There was no pity in the dark orbs that rested on her. Alice viewed her miserable sister with contempt.

What a fool she had been to let this thing drag on when she could have ended it quickly by allowing Nora Evans to mix a small dose of poison in Betty's food.

But Alice shrank from deliberate murder. She entertained the foolish idea that slowly starving her sister to death was not murder. An autopsy would reveal that she had died from natural causes.

Self-protection was always uppermost in this fiendish woman's mind. In her present condition Betty must succumb in less than a week. And then she would

become the sole heir of the Procter estate at her father's death.

As she turned to leave the tower, she said:

"I ask you once more to be patient, Betty. I'll probably will get a chance to speak to father about you tomorrow. And whatever you do, don't let anyone see you prowling about the grounds at night as you have been doing. If you are caught, I won't have anything more to do with your case."

Poor Betty did not move. She made no sign that she had heard her sister's last words.

Chapter 114

BETTY'S FATE

ALICE GORDON'S mind was considerably disturbed as she made her way cautiously back to her boudoir. She at once sent for Nora Evans and these two birds of a feather indulged in a lengthy whispered conversation. Although they moved in different stations, they were both criminals at heart.

At the conclusion of their confab, the Evans girl disappeared in her usual stealthy manner.

But hardly an hour had elapsed when she returned. The expression on her face indicated that she was the bearer of important news. Alice gave her one look, then inquired in a tone of fright:

"What is it now, Nora?"

"I was passing the library when I heard your husband and your father talking," the girl began. "They—they——"

"Yes—yes!" Alice interrupted eagerly. "What were they talking about?"

"The tower, Mrs. Gordon."

"The tower?"

Nora Evans nodded.

"I heard your husband say that the tower was to be torn down in a few days," she informed her mistress. "The contract has already been let out."

Alice stared at the speaker, horrified.

"And that is not all," the girl continued. "Bob Harding was also in the library. He asked permission from your husband to explore the tower before it is demolished. You know what it will mean if he does that."

"Yes, I know," gasped Alice, her face pale as a sheet. "That means we must take quick action."

She took a few turns up and down the room, obviously excited. If her sister was found in the tower all was lost indeed. Alice knew that she would stand exposed as a trickstress and a woman of monumental deceit.

What the consequences would be she was afraid to think about.

Betty would cry for her father and tell him the whole truth about herself. And her father, who had already forgiven her in his heart, would take her in his arms.

For the moment Alice did not think of the loss of half of the Procter fortune such a reunion would entail.

She was thinking of what it would do to her reputation. What logical excuse could she give for imprisoning her only sister in the tower and keep her there by means of a network of dastardly lies?

It was the truth Alice feared—the truth about her double-dealing and criminal intentions.

"Shall I go to the drugstore and get those drops I spoke to you about, Mrs. Gordon?" The question was asked with a furtive glance at the latter by Nora Evans. "Within an hour your troubles would be over and——"

"No—no!" Alice gasped with a look of fright. "Anything but that. We must find some other way of preventing the worst!"

"But," the girl persisted with murder in her heart, "it would be so easy. If you had listened to me weeks ago, you wouldn't be worrying about the situation now. We could have buried her during the night and no one would be any the wiser."

Alice was shivering with horror.

She did not have the nerve to commit deliberate

murder nor allow anyone else to do it. Betty must be removed without resorting to this.

Her brain was in a ferment of thought. Suddenly her face brightened. Yes, the thing was feasible.

A Dr. Stanford conducted a private sanitarium near a Chicago suburb called "Lombard." She knew the man by reputation, which, by the way was somewhat unsavory.

"I have it!" she cried, shaking her maid by the shoulder in her excitement. "Leave me alone now. Go downstairs and keep an eye on Bob Harding. Don't lose sight of him during the next few days, and be on hand when I want you."

Nora Evans left the room reluctantly. She did not enjoy playing the spy in the house any longer. It had become a dangerous occupation.

All that day Alice busied herself. She spent quite a while at the telephone, taking good care that no one was near enough to hear her part of the conversation.

But when she finished a smile of satisfaction had come to her face to stay.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening when she sent for Nora Evans. The usual summons failed to bring her confidential maid. Impatient and angered, Alice was obliged to wait on herself.

As she slipped from her boudoir and stepped out into the dimly lighted corridor, she noticed the figure of a woman at the farther end near the stairway.

For a moment she stood transfixed. There was something very familiar about this slender figure.

"Good God!" she gasped as recognition came "That is Betty!"

The situation was fraught with frightful danger It called for quick and instant action.

Betty, unconscious of being observed by her sis-

ter, glided toward a door to the left. It led to the room occupied by her father. But before she had a chance to turn the knob, Alice was upon her.

"You fool!" Alice whispered hoarsely. "Have you gone absolutely insane? If you are seen everything is lost. Come with me!"

Poor Betty did not have the strength to resist. She made a desperate attempt to release herself from her sister's firm grip and partly turned the knob in the door.

But the next instant she was being propelled down the long corridor with an irresistible force.

She might have attracted her father's attention by screaming, but it seemed that she had lost her voice.

Alice had just succeeded in shoving Betty through the door leading to her boudoir, when old John Procter appeared. He looked around with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Well, that's strange," he muttered to himself. "I am sure I heard someone at my door."

Slowly he turned and went back to bed.

In the meantime Betty was again in the secure grasp of her sister. The struggle was short.

In a few moments the younger of the two lay helpless across the bed, a gag over her mouth and her hands and feet bound together.

It was a desperate situation which required a desperate remedy. Alice was determined that Betty should not spoil her game at this stage.

Once more she went in search of Nora Evans and found her at last.

"There is no time to be lost," the mistress of the house said hurriedly. "Betty is in my room." And she recited her experience, adding: "We must act quickly. I talked to Dr. Stanford over the telephone, and he is willing to take my sister as a patient. We can trust him."

"Why, you don't mean to take her to the sanitarium at this late hour, do you?" Nora inquired.

"It will have to de done," Alice replied. "There is no other way out. I've got Betty safe now, but she will raise a rumpus at the first chance. Come with me and we'll decide what is to be done."

Upon arriving in her boudoir, this heartless creature discovered that her sister had fainted.

Without paying the least attention to her, she began the discussion of her latest plan with Nora. The first thing they needed was a closed car. There was one in the garage, but Alice was afraid to drive it herself.

"Why not ask the chauffeur?" Nora suggested.

"We couldn't do anything worse," the other answered in a tone of fright. "He is too loyal to my husband. He can't be bought and so can't be trusted."

For some time these two fine specimens of depraved womanhood put their heads together.

They argued guardedly and long without finding a way out of this dilemma. And yet, Betty must be removed to the sanitarium before morning.

"Isn't there some man among the servants who can drive the car and who could be trusted to keep his mouth shut?" Alice asked, her patience nearly gone. "Don't you know someone, Nora?"

The latter smiled shrewdly.

"Yes, there is James, the gardener," she said. "I think he would do it, but you'll have to pay him pretty well to keep silent."

Alice considered a moment.

"I'll pay him a reasonable sum, of course," she declared. "But I won't be bled. I think," she added with a peculiar look at her maid, "that your influence with the gardner ought to count for something. Unless I am very much mistaken I saw you come from his room as I was

searching for you in the servants' quarters."

Nora Evans' sudden blush was that of admitted guilt.

"But you are mistaken, Mrs. Gordon," she lied. "James and I are good friends and nothing more. I hope you don't believe me capable of going to his room at this hour of the night?"

"Well, perhaps I was mistaken," the mistress of the house conceded. "But I wish you'd try your friend. the gardner. I'll make it worth his while. I'll give him a hundred dollars in cash money before we start."

"Make it two hundred and give it to me now so that I can bring it to him." Nora said with another shrewd smile. "I'll answer for him."

"Oh, is that the way the land lays?" Alice retorted. "So you two are partners. And you wouldn't mind going to his room after all, would you? Alright. you shall have your wish."

From a well-filled purse she counted the amount of money demanded and gave it to Nora.

Without another word the latter left and was gone for a little over half an hour. When she returned with the gardner, he seemed to know what was expected of him.

With an ingratiating grin at Mrs. Gordon he stepped over to the bed and stared at the still unconscious figure of Betty.

"Is she dead?" he asked in a whisper.

"No, you boob," Nora broke in before her mistress could answer the question. "I told you that she fainted."

Alice instinctively disliked this man. He had the appearance and the manners of a slick crook. She became aware that his shifty eyes sought those of her maid frequently.

"You know what is expected of you, don't you?"

she queried.

James nodded and another grin overspread his face.

"Yes, Nora told me all about it," he responded impudently. "You want me to drive that dame, there," pointing to the bed, "to some kind of a sanitarium. Well, I am ready to start. Are you?"

Mrs. Gordon would like to have rebuked the fellow. But she knew that she could not afford to offend him. Was he not her partner in crime now?

She put a wrap across her shoulders, then walked to the door and peered into the hall cautiously.

"I guess the coast is clear," she whispered. "Let's be off."

Without being told to do so, the man picked up the slender form of the still unconscious Betty, and almost crushed it in his brawny arms. Alice acted as an advance guard with Nora Evans bringing up the rear. Between them walked the gardner, a constant grin on his face.

The house was quiet as a grave. Occasionally they paused to make sure that no one followed them. Finally they managed to reach the rear stairway. The descent was not so easily accomplished, for the steps creaked.

"Wait a moment!" Nora's harsh whisper came as a shock to Alice.

"What is the matter?" the latter asked, trembling with fear.

"I heard a door open and close behind us," the girl told her two companions.

They waited in an agony of suspense. Not a sound could be heard.

Finally they proceeded even more cautiously. By the time they arrived at the garage in the rear of the big house, the gardner was perspiring profusely.

As he attempted to wipe the moisture from his brow with his sleeve, he almost dropped his burden.

Betty seemed to have regained consciousness by the jerky motion, for she began to struggle.

"Cut it out, or I'll brain you!" hissed the brute.

Gagged and bound as she was, she could not utter a sound nor offer much resistance.

But her ears and eyes were wide open and her senses were keenly alert. She knew that she was being placed on the back seat of a closed automobile.

And she knew also that, as the car began to move, that she was being taken away from Oak Manor by her sister and another woman whom she recognized as Nora Evans.

But what she did not know was the destination of this midnight trip, nor what fate held in store for her.

Chapter 115

IN PASSION'S GRIP.

WHEN A married man deliberately advises his lovely young wife to have a good time while he is away from home, unless that wife is a thoroughly domesticated female blindly devoted to her husband, she is apt to take him at his word. Ruth Fillmore was anything but a domesticated female.

Nor was she any longer blindly devoted to her husband. The faith which at one time they reposed in each other had been badly shaken.

Guy Fillmore had chosen evil companions. He had repeatedly broken the silken cord that bound him to his wife. And he had arrived at the stage where he no longer cared about her moral welfare.

His own personal enjoyment was paramount. The gay white lights claimed him and he was fast sinking into the morass of licentiousness.

And when he boarded the steamer for Paris, he found by pre-arrangement, a voluptuous young woman who had been in the front row of a chorus, already comfortably settled in a steamer chair.

Ruth, although she had tried hard to hide her feelings, was deeply resentful of her husband's too apparent selfishness. Why had he not asked her to accompany him on this trip abroad?

She realized that the relations between her and Guy were no longer what they once had been.

But during the last few weeks, and especially since he had brought Vernon Douglass, the handsome actor into their home, he had shown flashes of a re-

awakened love for her.

But his sudden and entirely unexpected departure for Parie came like a dash of cold water on all her hopes.

She shed no tears. In her heart was a fierce determination to show Guy that other men valued her companionship if he didn't.

He had openly encouraged her to receive Douglass in her home during his absence. Ruth frankly like the handsome actor. In fact she prided herself upon the fact that they were rather close friends.

And after all, there was really no harm in being seen in public places with him. Some of her women friends had shown plainly how envious they were.

And they were married women, too. Every single one of them had craved an introduction to the actor, but Ruth took precious good care that they did not lure him away from her.

Vernon Douglass had a method all his own of attracting the opposite sex. Ruth discovered that more and more.

So far his conduct toward her had been always respectful. Yet, she had discovered a strange look in his eyes when they rested on her.

He admired her, surely. Had he not toasted her as being the most beautiful woman? And he had done it in the presence of her husband on several occasions?

During the week which followed, Ruth saw a great deal of Douglass. Every afternoon he came to spend an hour or two with her

He was a wonderful performer on the piano. He played the most difficult sonatas with a technique that was a revelation to her.

And how he would look at her while he played. It made her shiver.

Once, when he had finished a beautiful aria, she

was standing close to him. His arm stole around her waist before she realized it.

"Oh, you mustn't," she protested mildly.

"Why not?" he asked blandly. "Aren't we the best of friends?"

"Yes, but——"

"I beg your pardon," he cut her short as he rose. "I suppose I took too much for granted."

Douglass left a few minutes later. His voice trembled as he said good-by to her, and there was a hurt expression in his fine dark eyes.

Ruth felt sorry for him.

That same night she phoned him and asked him to call the next afternoon.

She had begun to realize all this man meant to her. Yet, she was quite sure that she did not love him. The idea had never occurred to her.

He was merely a dear friend who had come warmly recommended by her husband.

Douglass came eagerly. But he held himself securely in check. He did not say a word or make a single move which might have been construed as an affront to her.

Again he played, while she stood close.

It was one of those sweet melodies that steal into your heart like a breath of spring air and intoxicate you with the joy of living. And he did not stay as long as usual.

"Will you come to the show to-night?" he asked as he drew on his gloves. "I'll call for you and bring you home."

Ruth debated in silence for a moment.

"I will if you promise to behave," she said at last giving him a roguish smile.

"Of course, I'll behave." Douglass returned, meet

ing her gaze.

"That is a promise, is it?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Fillmoer nodded.

"Alright, I'll be ready at eight," she said.

He left after touching her finger tips with his lips. He could feel how they trembled.

That night Ruth occupied a box by herself. Between the acts Douglass came and sat with her. They were the cynosure of all eyes.

And it so happened that several people were at the theater who knew Mrs. Fillmore quite well.

After the performance the actor suggested a visit to one of the cabarets. Mrs. Fillmore demurred, then finally consented to go with him.

They were seated in a cozy corner from where they could observe the stage and the wide floor used for dancing. There was a deliberate taunt in Ruth's eyes as she leaned back in her chair and looked at the actor.

She was a flaming creature, awakening somehow the picture of a pink full-grown rose.

The actor spoke to her very low and very wistfully, and with more tenderness and reverent yearning in his words and voice than he usually displayed when with women.

He had come to the sudden realization that he loved her with all his heart and soul. He told her so very frankly.

"I just can't help it, Ruth," he added, for the first time using her christian name.

"You don't mean it," she answered saucily.

"But I do mean it," Douglass insisted.

She laughed quite merrily. There was a sting in it for him. Because of his reverence for her, because of the idolatry that marked his regard of her, he had a-

dashed himself before her.

And she, refusing to take him seriously, had laughed. He felt humiliated.

The orchestra was playing a slow, lilting waltz.

"Let's dance," he suggested.

She rose with a nod and went to his arms. The music was irresistible.

Carried away by the spirit, Ruth leaned closer toward him. He held her close and a strange light leaped up into his eyes.

Then, breathless and dizzy, they were seated again. Douglass beckoned to a waiter. He did not consult Mrs. Fillmore but ordered something that came in a long-necked bottle.

He poured out a glass for her and one for himself.

She tasted it carefully at first, then gulped the contents down and smacked her lips.

"That's wine, isn't it?" she asked, her eyes sparkling.

"Do you like it?" he countered.

"Frankly, yes."

He filled her glass again, but this time she sipped slowly.

The effect of the wine began to make itself felt before long. Ruth became gay and talkative. They danced again and she did not object when he fairly crushed her to his bosom.

It was long after midnight when they started for home. Douglass put Ruth in his car and drove her home.

And from time to time he gave an exhibition of one-handed driving that astounded his fair companion. His little familiarities no longer shocked Ruth.

"Please don't stop your machine in front of the apartment building, Vernon," she requested.

"Why not?" he grinned.

"Because every time an automobile halts at the entrance the women in the building run to the windows to rubber," Ruth told him. "I don't want to give them a chance to get something on me."

The actor nodded.

Two squares from the apartment building he parked the car. He and Ruth got out, walking the rest of the way.

Up the marble stairway they went with utmost caution, Douglass holding her arm.

Ruth disengaged herself long enough to take the latchkey from her purse. She opened the door, then walked into the living room with the actor at her heels.

She took off her wrap and even in the semi-darkness he could see her bare, gleaming white shoulders.

He noticed that she was looking at him in a manner which made his heart beat fast.

In two long strides he was beside the woman. She seemed to anticipate what was coming, for she retreated and smiled at him in the most tantalizing way. She knew very well that she could not keep him at bay.

"Wait till I turn on the light," she whispered.

"What for?" he inquired with a low laugh.

And then, with a sudden motion, he took her in his arms. He kissed her first on the lips, and when these were snatched away, on the cheeks, eyes and hair. Vainly she struggled, for the man's passion frightened her.

"Ruth—Ruth!" he gasped. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?" she asked innocently as she lay passive in his embrace.

"Made me love you."

"Oh, don't talk such nonsense. You don't really love me, Vernon. You only think you do."

"But I do love you," he protested. "I have fought against it for weeks. Good God, girl, you don't know

what you have come to be in my life. You are my inspiration. I could not live without you now."

She shoved him away and held him at arms' length.

"But I am a married woman," she said, her voice aquiver. "And my husband is your friend."

"Your husband does not deserve you," the actor exclaimed. "He is deceiving you. He did not go to Paris alone. A chorus girl from the Follies went with him."

If Ruth was shocked at this bit of information, she gave no hint. Nor did she object when he again took her in his arms and rained kisses on her lips. In fact she returned them with her eyes closed and her breath coming fast. The man had awakened something within her that flamed up suddenly. Before her a dark abyss yawned, and she was ready to jump.

Chapter 116

FROM THE DEAD.

VERY LITTLE was know about Dr. Stanford's private sanitarium, although the institution over which he presided and owned, never wanted for patients. People living on farms surrounding his big place did not take the trouble to make inquiries. They held themselves aloof partly out of sympathetic respect for the unfortunates confined there, and partly because visitors were at no time allowed to enter unless they were personally known to the physician.

The latter was a big man, rather past middle age. His six feet of height and over-developed stomach made him look larger than he really was.

But it was neither his weight nor his height that attracted one. His features were of the type, once seen, is not easily forgotten.

Although he affected the exterior of a professional man, a close student of the human physiognomy would not have labeled him as a practising physician. He had the face of an escaped convict and the shifty eyes of one.

His closely cropped beard and well-tailored clothes, as well as his suave, pleasing manners, made up for this.

He made friends without seeking them. His patients came to him without advertising for them. But his friends were those—although members of exclusive society circles — whose moral standing forbid close scrutiny.

His patients—God pity them—became his victims

the hour they entered his sanitarium.

Not a single one of them was ever known to come out alive. And into the hands of this man Alice Gordon had delivered her sister Betty.

But fate took a hand also in the case of this deeply wronged young woman. It came in the form of a man fleeing from three pursuers on a moonlight night along the country road.

Before escaping from the prison five miles away, the fugitive had snatched a gun from one of the guards, and now, as he heard those thudding feet behind him, and thought what re-capture meant, he set his teeth hard, and vowed that they should never take him back alive.

Beautiful as this moonlight night might be to other eyes, it was hateful to his. But for that, they would never have tracked him; but for that, he might escape even now.

The road made a sudden turn. For a half a minute he was screened from his pursuers by trees and underbrush.

On the left side there was an iron gate which led to a group of buildings which looked like an institution of some sort.

There was a long lane, bordered by trees on both sides. Beyond them, he thought, lay safety. Without hesitation he followed his first impulse. Like a deer he sped up the lane.

The buildings he approached were wrapped in darkness, save where in one upper window a faint light shone.

That window was partly raised, and underneath it the wall was covered with a trellis which, vine covered, ran all the way up to the sill.

With cat-like ease the fugitive climbed up. He

pushed the window upward very gently, and peered in the room.

He saw at once that it was not a sleeping apartment. It had a curious heavy perfume, as if filled with flowers. He stepped resolutely inside, but the next moment he drew back with a sudden start.

Although it was not a sleeping apartment, there lay one within whose slumber was not to be broken until judgement day. Between two candles at the far end of the room there stood a coffin!

"Good God!" he gasped, shuddering.

But there was no retracing his steps. If his pursuers had followed him up the lane they would surely catch him if he climbed down that trellis.

Quickly blowing out the candles, he held his breath and listened.

His eyes were fixed on the country road which ended, snake-like on the hill beyond. Three figures were moving along at a rapid gate, and then the fugitive knew he was safe for a time at least.

From the window he watched them disappear. Then he ventured farther into the room. But reason told him to be careful. He must have a light. Returning to the window, he drew the shade, then lighted one of the candles.

His next move was to bolt the door from the inside. Then he looked about the room, of which he and the silent figure in the coffin were the only inmates.

The coffin, he noticed, was a cheap affair, covered with ordinary black cloth. He glanced at the girl lying in it and gave a gasp.

She was beautiful even in death. The features were painfully thin, but they were regular and exquisitely well formed.

For a moment he stood in awed silence.

"Poor girl," he muttered. "What a shame that you had to pass away in your youth. How much better it would have been for you to live, and for a coffin lid to have covered me."

Then he turned away with a sudden shaking of his shoulders.

He crossed the room and once more stood near the window, debating with himself whether to leave this room of death at once or remain.

While his natural inclination urged him to be gone from this grewsome scene, something within him insistently urged against it.

Half against his will he was drawn back to the side of the coffin. And before he knew what he was doing, his hand had touched the cheek of the woman.

To his intense surprise he found it warm.

And yet, to all appearances she was dead. Again and again he touched the cheek, then both of them.

When he attempted to turn the head he found that rigor mortis had not yet set in.

This seemed to indicate that the young woman had either been dead for a short while, or she was still alive.

"Good, lord!" he said softly. "What does this mean?"

Very gently he lifted the head, and a low exclamation burst from his lips. He saw the eyelids flutter for a moment, then they were raised. A pair of mutely pleading eyes met his.

"Help — me! Help — me!" the words came in broken whispers. "They mean—to bury me—alive!"

The man stood utterly speechless. He guessed instantly that this unfortunate young woman was the victim of foul play. She had been prepared for burial and yet she lived.

"Yes, I'll help you if I can," he said in a gentle tone.

With strong arms he lifted her from the coffin. But she did not seem to be able to stand on her feet. With a pitiful little wail she collapsed and he placed her on a chair.

"Oh, please—save me!" the girl pleaded, her voice growing somewhat stronger. "Save me — or kill me. Don't let them—bury me."

"They are not going to bury you," he assured her.

The man bent over and soothed her as he would a child.

Then, as he glanced quickly about, he noticed a number of small bottles standing on a table in the corner of the room.

The largest one looked rather familiar. It was flat and contained some amber-colored fluid.

As he drew out the cork and smelled it, a smile of satisfaction crossed his weather-beaten face. The bottle contained good whiskey.

"Here, take a drink of this," he urged. "It will give you strength."

The young woman obeyed.

"Now, if you don't mind, I'll take a little of this," said the man. "Lord knows, I need it."

After he drank he wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and approached the door.

"Where are you going?" she inquired anxiously.

"To call someone to take care of you," he told her.

"No—no!" she replied in a frightened whisper. "If you call them they will surely kill me. They have tried to poison me. Oh, if you have the least pity in your heart, take me away with you."

He looked her over curiously—reflectively.

"Who tried to poison you?" he demanded.

"Dr. Stanford," she answered, her eyes dilating with terror. "Dr. Stanford and his assistants. I was brought here for that purpose."

"Why, that is almost unbelievable!" he gasped. "Who are you?"

"I am Betty Harding," came back softly. "But, please do not delay. Take me away from here before it is too late. And you are in danger of being killed, too. Oh, you don't know what a horrible place this is."

For some time the man debated with himself.

Already a fugitive from justice and pursued by prison guards, how could he burden himself with this young woman? But he found it infinitely harder to resist those mutely pleading eyes.

"Alright," he said. "I'll risk it."

He made a quick survey of the immediate surroundings.

As he opened the door cautiously he noticed that the corridor led to the stairs. Like a shadow he descended, then came to another door. This he opened also.

A low cry of triumph escaped his lips. Unless something unforeseen happened the way to liberty was open.

Returning to the floor above, he found the young woman slowly pacing the floor and wringing her hands. Without saying a word he examined the clothes closet. It contained various articles of feminine wearing apparel.

"Help yourself," he said to the girl, then turned his back.

As he stood thus, he could hear the rustling of skirts. But he did not change his position until she bid him.

"I am ready," she told him. "Now let us get away from this dreadful house."

He noticed that she staggered a trifle.

"You must first drink a little more from that bottle," he advised. "You are weak and need all the strength you can get."

Betty did as she was told.

It seemed that the fiery fluid worked wonders. The color returned to her face, and she actually had the courage to smile. In breathless silence she waited.

"Don't you think we better start?" she inquired.

"Yes, but I want to talk to you first," he responded. "Do you know why I am here?"

"You are here because heaven sent you," said Betty.

"I hope so," he remarked with a grin. "At any rate, I will save you if it is humanly possible. But I must tell you frankly who and what I am. My name is Dick Harris, and I am an escaped convict.

"I was running from the guards when I entered this room. Now are you still willing to trust yourself to me, Miss Harding? If not, say the word, and I'll go as quickly and quietly as I came."

She looked at him.

"Perhaps I did not introduce myself properly," she replied. "I am married, which makes me Mrs. Harding."

"Alright, then, Mrs. Harding. As I told you before I am an escaped convict and generally regarded as a dangerous man. Aren't you afraid you are taking chances in trusting yourself to me?"

"No, I am not," she decided quickly. "You are not a dangerous man — I won't believe it. Whatever your crime was——"

"I have killed a man," he broke in.

"Why?" The question came in a low, quivering tone.

"Because he deserved to be killed!" the man exclaimed, his tall figure straightening up and his eyes flashing fire. "He wronged my little sister and when he refused to marry her. I sent a bullet through his brain.

Betty's gaze was fixed on the speaker. And for the first time she studied his features.

What she saw there came as a relief. This man was no ordinary criminal. His manner of speech was that of a gentleman. Impulsively she held out her thin hand.

"God forbid that I should condemn you for what you have done," she said feelingly. "I wish every girl in this world had a brother as loyal as you. I am not afraid to trust myself to you."

The man was about to speak again, when a slight noise coming from the corridor outside sealed his lips.

"Quick, get behind me!" he whispered. "I hear someone coming!"

Chapter 117

FORSAKEN.

RUTH FILLMORE had apparently flung all self-restraint and caution to the four winds. Vernon Douglass had become a daily caller at her apartment. Every evening she sat in the box he held reserved for her at the theater where he played the leading role in a society drama.

She was thrilled by the man's splendid acting, and he had awakened in her a feeling she had never experienced before.

Continued in next number

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